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MOURNING DOVE FOOD STUDIED
FOR BETTER GAME MANAGEMENT

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The mourning dove, one of the most popular game birds of the South, recently has been the subject of research by scientists in Alabama. The mourning dove is a migratory bird found throughout the country, but has its greatest concentrations in the South during fall and winter months. Hunted for both sport and food, the dove has held the interest of Federal and State conservation officials, especially with regard to preserving immature and breeding birds.

Knowledge of dove feeding habits is essential to establish successful management practices, according to Walter Rosene, Jr., whose report on a mourning-dove food-habits study is made available by the U. S. Biological Survey. A graduate of Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Rosene was a member of the Alabama Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, sponsored by the Alabama State Department of Conservation, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, the American Wildlife Institute, and the Bureau of Biological Survey. Leaders and workers of the Unit, and members of the Survey cooperated with Rosene in collecting data included in the report.

In cooperation with the Food Habits Section of the Biological Survey, dove food habits have been investigated by examination of 287 specimens. Findings show the bird to be almost a complete vegetarian, using legumes and various grains as the main items of diet. Specimens were collected at feeding areas or watering places to obtain information as to the foods that cause the birds to concentrate in large flocks in fall.

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In addition to laboratory analyses, field studies have revealed interesting characteristics of the dove's feeding habits. Year around observations in Alabama have shown the bird to be a powerful flyer, capable of traveling great distances for food. The speed in flight is also partly responsible for its attractiveness as a game bird, the Biological Survey states.

Doves begin to feed in large flocks late in summer. In winter, the early morning and late afternoon hours are the most popular feeding times. Summer feeding periods are less regular. Both male and female incubate the eggs, alternately leaving the nest in search of food. Particular in choice of food, doves also choose their watering places carefully. Roseme included these facts in his report and also tabulated plant-food percentages and described the principal plant foods.

Information on the life history of mourning doves being limited, the Biological Survey in cooperation with State game departments, is conducting similar investigations in Iowa, Mississippi, and other States.